

## GRAND REGION, 2005-2009 PLAN

STATEMENT TO HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE,  
REPRESENTATIVE PHIL LAJOY, CHAIRMAN,  
HEARING OF 17 MARCH 2005,  
GRAND RAPIDS

By personal service

### THE PLAN

It is possibly a function of the differing levels of bureaucratic attention, but certainly arresting that the MDOT's Grand Region has eight pages of text to six pages for Metro Region. Oakland County alone has almost as many people as the Grand Region, with sobering plans to widen I-75 using funds which would come from higher units of government. This proposal would dwarf the expensive South Beltline which created a highway corridor where one did not exist.

The South Beltline (M-6) is treated almost cavalierly with much devoted to the "South Belt Shuffle" and not enough to expense, passed over as a "major transportation investment." (p.67) Whilst extolling the cost of the M-6/ US-131 interchange and ancillary work required to the old expressway, the Plan fails to mention the systemic over-run well beyond the judicious \$495 millions of State/ Federal money which was the lodestar as late as 1995. The Department and House Transportation Committee should take note of a possible similar indifference to reality when judging I-75, *supra*.

The introduction at 67 tells much about the culture of public roads in the State. When an initiative is called "Preserve First," one is entitled to believe that the opposite philosophy once existed, or may yet. A rational society would naturally preserve "first," but Michigan is always confronted with preservation and repair going back to Rep. Mary Brown's "Transportation Survival Package" in 1982. Michigan's streets and roads were *again* in crisis in 1997. That the Grand Region can take pride in a highway *de novo* -- admittedly with a massive Federal contribution -- and yet submit a multi-page attachment, "2005-2009 Road & Bridge Program," the like of which has been going on for years, is a mark of indifference to scarce public funds. The Program is intrinsically necessary, however.

Pages 67 to 70 are almost all road projects. The exceptions to this programmatic monoculture are: "Lake Express Ferry Service." This idea is nothing but good. "GT2" at 69 concerns a "major transit investment study . . ." It is heartening to know that State and local officials are becoming serious in the transit field. There was much better bus service in Grand Rapids starting *ca.* 1996, one manifestation of which is the Rapid Central Station duly mentioned. The GT2, however, is pronounced fifteen years after the Citizens' League published Down the Road. This dilatory planning culture must be addressed if the Grand Region is to hold itself out as an advanced, vibrant area per its advertisements.

"Corridor Improvement Strategies" at 72 contains "Major new preservation projects . . .," four of which contain elements which are not preservation but new construction. One must not mix

metaphors. The most remarkable entry thereunder is "I-96 Access" *re* "any additional access improvements," but said "improvements" to a super-highway are certainly not "preservation."

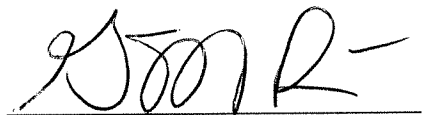
## SOCIAL POLICY

A year ago this month the Managing Director of the Oakland County Road Commission spoke the Lake Orion Chamber of Commerce. The Baldwin Road/ I-75 congestion problem was addressed. His solution: "Contact your congressman." This pronouncement was contemptible, which should have been: contact your County Executive and County Commissioner.

In 2000 the (then) Chairman of the Macomb County Board of Commissioners spoke tentatively of an new east-west highway corridor in northern Macomb County to supplement the new, but already development and congestion beset M-59. There is reasonable presumption that he expected the State of Michigan to pay much of it. He should have been making overtures to the Legislature to permit county financing of such a great undertaking. The route could be a toll facility, since a major new road incapable of supporting itself should not exist.

The philosophy for the famously spreading Metro Region or the Grand Region should be the same: take responsibility for yourselves, especially sound advice for local officials like those of south Kent and Ottawa Counties. The Federal Government and State of Michigan should not provide huge subsidies to far-flung commuting and development patterns. If government is routinely deemed inefficiently over-bearing, then raise money and accept the organisational costs locally as personal responsibility. To "live [develop] where you want" yet expect two levels of sovereign and continued support services from local government to make your dreams come true is social engineering -- which Americans allege they dislike. The State of Michigan should not succor it.

I thank Representative LaJoy, the other members of the Committee, and their staff for this opportunity to comment.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "G. M. Ross", with a horizontal line underneath.

G. M. Ross, Ph.D.

10561 36th S.E.

Lowell, Michigan 49331